DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 126 SP 035 509

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TITLE The Role of Goals and Belief Systems in the Acquisition of Ill-Defined Professional Skills: A Case Study.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Counselor Characteristics; Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Intellectual Development; *Interpersonal Competence; *Professional Development; Professional Education; School Psychologists; *Skill Development; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This case study contributes to the debate about professional education and the nature of complex interpersonal skills. Preservice training programs make certain assumptions about how students acquire practical knowledge and consequently about how such knowledge is best taught. Students form their own beliefs, which in turn exercise considerable influence over the way they learn. Learning professional skills is thus not merely a cognitive act but involves the whole person--a matter of attitude as well as intellect. The current research focused on school-psychological interviewing and consultation skills. Graduate students learned to collect relevant information from parents and teachers about the academic or behavior problems of a pupil in a sensitive and empathetic manner. Although the specific qualities which constitute the expert interviewer are still under discussion, it is clear that more than technical know-how is involved. The study, therefore, tried to identify what students considered the most important aspects of interviewing, and how they described their attempts at becoming proficient in these. It became evident in the course of this research that students were learning much more than interviewing skills, that indeed they were constructing their professional and personal identity as part of the process. (Contains 22 references.) (Author/LL)

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The Role of Goals and Belief Systems in the Acquisition of Ill-Defined Professional Skills: A Case Study.

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ABSTRACT

This case study contributes to the debate about professional education and the nature of complex interpersonal skill. Preservice training programs make certain assumptions about how students acquire practical knowledge and consequently on how such knowledge is best taught. Students form their own beliefs, which in turn exercise considerable influence over the way they learn. Learning professional skills is thus not merely a cognitive act but involves the whole person. It is a matter of attitude as well as intellect.

The current research focused on school-psychological interviewing and consultation skills. Graduate students learned to collect relevant information from parents and teachers about the academic or behavior problems of a pupil in a sensitive and empathetic manner. Although the specific qualities which constitute the expert interviewer are still under discussion, it is clear that more than technical know-how is involved. The study, therefore, tried to identify what students considered the most important aspects of interviewing, and how they described their attempts at becoming proficient in these. It became evident in the course of this research that students were learning much more than interviewing skills, that indeed they were constructing their professional and personal identity as part of the process.

The following were the expectations of school psychology students about the graduate program they had entered a few weeks before:

> Alice: "To be honest, my enthusiasm was never in full force... maybe because I wasn't sure what to expect out of the program. I wouldn't say that I'm unenthusiastic. I'm just a little skeptical at times because I'm unsure about what I'll be doing in my school psychologist role and how much I'll enjoy it."
>
> Beth: "...it never made much sense to me how somebody could be working in an educational setting without any experience of working with kids in the classroom. That was why I wanted to go into teaching, because I felt it would benefit the teacher and the child more if the school psychologist had a better understanding of what actually goes on in the schools, rather than just what they are doing in their little testing environment."
>
> Claire: "I was originally thinking about going to medical school. I was taking a lot of science courses, and then I needed a major, and I really hadn't had a lot of psychology but I really liked it. And so I majored in it, and I ended up loving psychology, and I always wanted to work with kids. And instead of education, I had a more kind of a helping-kids orientation, and school psychology was the best place to do that."
>
> Dave: "I don't want to limit myself as a school psychologist to only school-related problems. But I also realize that in order to do that I'm going to have to get

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> additional training outside of the school psych program. That could be some kind of training for my internship or also do some kind of post-doc where I get specific training in that area. Strictly as a school psychologist coming from this program, I think their training is only in school-related problems."

At this point students were still not quite aware of what specific skills they were to acquire in graduate training. The purpose of this study was to investigate how initial expectations, such as the ones quoted above, are related to the development of complex professional skills, such as those involved in school-psychological interviewing and consultation.

Theoretical Context

A complex professional skill is unlikely to be fully captured in variables of observable behavior that can be operationalized and imitated directly. Probably the most important aspects of skill are tacit, i.e., we may know them but cannot tell what we know (see Polanyi, 1966). These aspects are not purely cognitive, they are mixed up with our feelings, drives, hopes, ambitions, and beliefs, in short, with our whole psychological, even physiological functioning. The development of a new skill in a person is likely to involve and affect the whole person. Especially in the case of a social skill, this will imply some form of reorganization or elaboration of the way the person perceives the world, i.e., his or her value and belief system.

This relationship between skill and a person's values and beliefs has recently led to an increased attention to the value-laden assumptions on which practitioners base their actions as they exercise their skills. Sandra Hollingsworth (1989), for instance, investigated changes in preservice teachers' knowledge and beliefs before, during, and after their training program. She came to the conclusion that pre-program beliefs about teaching played an important role in learning to teach:

> ...preprogram beliefs served as filters for processing program content and making sense of classroom contexts, [...] general managerial routines had to be in place before subject specific content and pedagogy became a focus of attention, [...] while preprogram interest in students as individuals and a preprogram-developed interest in subject pedagogy were needed to provide the motivation to do so. In turn, each new level of knowledge affected changes in preprogram beliefs. (1989, p. 168)

As a consequence, many teacher educators have started encouraging trainees to reflect on their own practice and the underlying assumptions it is based on (Posner, 1985; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Zeichner, 1991). Teacher education programs stress the importance of students keeping reflective journals when they go for practica. "Reflective storytelling" (Mattingly, 1991), "collective reflective practice" (Greenwood, 1991), and "reframing" one's own experience (Russell & Munby, 1991, all in Schoen, editor) have become favorite approaches to higher-order skill acquisition in teaching and beyond. Most of these ideas go back to the notion that Donald Schoen promoted in his books on the "reflective practitioner" (1983, 1987)

where he "argued for a new epistemology of practice." (1987, xi) Schoen claimed that practitioners make sense of situations by trying to transform them. Understanding and doing become one and the same. The process is initiated by:

> the perception of something troubling or promising, and it is terminated by the production of changes one finds on the whole satisfactory, or by the discovery of new features which give the situation new meaning and change the nature of the questions explored." (1983, p. 151)

The whole process of becoming a competent practitioner may be defined as a combination of trying to understand through actively transforming situations and by being transformed by them in the discovery of new questions. It is part of the nature of this process to produce cognitive dissonance: in order to learn something new, previously existing knowledge and beliefs have to be challenged. Schoen calls this the "unlearning of deep-seated theories in use" (1987, p. 291), an important mechanism for making progress in one's development from novice to competent practitioner. Old and often simplistic assumptions have to be challenged deliberately for new and more sophisticated perspectives to be put in place.

The current study owes much of its interest in the domain of reflective and tacit practical knowledge to the ideas first expressed by Schoen and Polanyi, ideas that try to conceptualize knowledge and learning very differently from the way most cognitive psychologists are currently defining these basic human functions. In addition to their largely philosophical writings, researchers especially in teacher education have also started to investigate these fuzzy domains of human learning empirically. As reviews by Carter (1990) and Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) indicate, the personal practical knowledge of practitioners (teachers and teacher students) has been the object of a variety of naturalistic case studies over the past ten years. People in the field have noticed that earlier assumptions of teacher effectiveness research were not fulfilling their original promise: "Simply telling novices what experts know will not produce expertise." (Carter, 1990, p. 299)

Elbaz (1983) and other researchers of practical knowledge after her have looked at the content dimensions of teachers' knowledge, but the more important parts of their research have dealt with the ways this knowledge is used and structured. Practical knowledge is "time bound and situation specific, personally compelling and oriented toward action." (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986, p. 512) It deals with the beliefs, insights, and habits that enable practitioners to do their work (ibid.). As such it has to be distinguished from two other types of professional knowledge that researchers in teacher education have been investigating: (a) teachers' information processing, i.e., their inflight decision-making while directing classroom activities, and (b) their pedagogical content knowledge, the way they understand subject matter and represent it to their students (Carter, 1990, p. 292).

Empirical research on practical knowledge has largely been in teacher education. My study shifts the focus to a field which, although closely related to teachers and schooling, considerably reduces the complexity of the situations in which professional skills are applied.

I have looked at school-psychological interviewing, a subskill of the consultation process that school psychologists engage in when called upon to help with the academic or behavior problems of a pupil. In most cases, such interviews involve a parent or a teacher and the school psychologist. They explore behavior symptoms of the problem student as well as the teacher's or parent's reasons for seeking professional help. The referral interview is typically the beginning of an extended intervention process that may require the school psychologist not only to meet several times with the involved parties, but also to observe the problem child in class, administer various types of formal assessments, design, implement, and monitor specific helping strategies, and possibly recommend placing the child in a special education class. Interviewing skills are clearly one of the basic competencies a school psychologist needs to acquire. But, it is only one skill in a profession whose interactions are by no means as complex as those confronting the researcher during classroom teaching.

Much of the research on teachers' practical knowledge follows practitioners who have already been in the field for some time. My study looked at trainees from the first to last semester of their academic training program. I was, therefore, not in a position to describe practical knowledge generated through years of professional experience. Instead, my focus was on the early developmental stages of such knowledge and sought to capture the processes that take place before practical knowledge solidifies and becomes tacit. At this initial stage, it is probably more appropriate to determine the learners' readiness to open up to new knowledge than to look for evidence of newly acquired skill. Interviewing being partially a social skill, some novices naturally come better prepared than others, but the key to a systematic investigation of learning to interview is likely to be found in learners' attitudes rather than their prior knowledge. The main questions of my study, therefore, probe into students' skill-related motivations and assumptions: What do students care about most when confronted with the task of learning interviewing and consultation skills? What influences their readiness to see and care about certain aspects of the target skill while overlooking others?

Methodology and Respondents

The respondents for my study were four graduate students in school psychology in their early to late twenties, identified by the pseudonyms Alice, Beth, Claire, and Dave. They were part of a small class of nine first-year students who started their PhD or Specialist (two-year) program in the fall of 1988 at a large midwestern university. None of them had previous experience in school psychology. Only Beth had been in contact with a school psychologist during the two years of her employment as an elementary-school teacher. I had access to all their core classes in school psychology because I was the instructional designer for interactive video programs that helped train these students in interviewing techniques. Interacting with the students served the double function of pilot-testing the effectiveness of the technology applications as well as pursuing my own research agenda. The four students had volunteered their participation in my study.

The basic learning-theoretical convictions that guided my investigation can be

summarized as follows. I believe with Kolb (1984) that "learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world" (p. 31); that it is an ongoing process of invention; that such continuity implies that "all learning is relearning" (ibid., p. 28), and that what we know is intricately linked with what we feel, believe in, what we need and aspire to. Learning is reflective, and important learning processes in adulthood are accomplished through a "perspective transformation" (Mezirow, 1981) that involves the adult's ability to reflect about her or his habits of judgment and concept formation.

Based on these premises, it was only logical to focus my research on those aspects of students' learning that seemed most closely connected to the experiential background that got them interested in this field of study in the first place. If the transition between experience and learning is continuous and if the development of new concepts and skills is based on the "relearning" of already existing concepts, then it is important to look for those aspects of the learning process that guarantee the continuity and link previous experiences with new learning. I call these aspects "concerns," i.e., beliefs or attitudes that have grown out of past experiences and shape the way new concepts and skills are accommodated within a person's intellectual repertoire.

This research was done as a qualitative case study that emphasizes interpretive methods of investigation. Interpretive approaches to social science research rely heavily on the observation of human behavior or actions in context.[1] For this reason their analyses have few problems remaining on a predominantly descriptive level, on which the respondents' actions are narrated and interpreted. The actions serve as a convenient guideline for sequencing the researcher's story and for stimulating the reader's event-oriented interest.

Given my focus on students' learning in graduate school, my study largely lacks the detail and storyline supplied by behavioral observations. The few actions that I was able to observe were restricted to classroom instruction and a small number of practical exercises, i.e., a role play, two or three parent interviews, and some work with interactive video programs. None of these involved behavioral exchanges that by themselves were suitable for structuring the research reports.

To look at students' learning of complex and ill-defined skills, I either had to test their performance at certain intervals or rely on their own accounts of their learning. Since testing their performance would not have helped me understand how the learning was accomplished, I chose the other path and investigated students' own accounts of what was happening to them.

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[1]I will use terms such as "interpretive," "ethnographic," "naturalistic," or "constructivist" in a generic sense for non-positivistic approaches to social-science research, even though each one of them represents one (or more) different positions in the current paradigm debate on research methodology (see Schwandt, 1989, 1990, 1993).

During the prolonged engagement with my respondents I took what Fred Erickson (1986) has called a "micro-ethnographic" approach, audiotaping every interview I did and transcribing it for in-depth analysis. This approach allows the investigator to "revisit the same event vicariously for repeated observations" (Erickson, 1986, p. 145), which has three major advantages: (1) It allows more completeness in the analysis; (2) it reduces the observer's dependence on primitive analytic typification; and (3) it reduces the observer's dependence on frequently occurring events as the best sources of data. (ibid.)

Although I collected a variety of observational, document, and interview data, the latter turned out to be by far the most important for this study. Trying to capture elements (mostly attitudinal) of students' learning required a detailed analysis of their own constructions of their development at significant points throughout the program. I chose these points in close proximity to salient learning events during the semesters, i.e., before and after initial interviewing instruction, after students' first and second interviews during an actual referral case, at the end of the first and second semester, and at the end of their course program. This was to capture students' reactions to new learning events while the events were still fresh in their minds.

Over the first two semesters, I did five individual and one focus-group interview with my respondents. With each of the three students who remained after the first year, I did another two or three follow-up interviews over the remaining period of their studies (1-3 years). Except for the one focus-group interview at the end of the second semester, all contacts with my respondents were one-on-one. I wanted to capture multiple perspectives rather than a more collective perspective on students' learning processes. My study was not designed as "collaborative research" (Reason & Rowan, 1981) with emphasis on the "empowerment" of respondents as part of the inquiry process. I wanted to follow students' development in the natural setting rather than building an inquiry framework that might have created special bonds between four (out of a class of nine) students resulting in a subculture within the classroom.

Procedures

To find out about students' learning of the target skill, I had to identify the pool of interview-related competencies that they were concerned about at least at some point during their training. Based on my interview data, class observations, and student documents, I generated a list of 52 competencies that one or more of my four respondents deemed relevant at some time during my contact with them. I then traced which competencies seemed most important to students throughout their training, which ones appeared and disappeared at different times, and which ones were most unexpected, based on what I knew about interviewing from the literature and from my own experience.

Together with this investigation of the target skill itself, I probed into students' views of larger issues related to their personal and professional development. This process generated ten different dimensions along which students articulated their thoughts. These

included their views on:

A. The Milieu of Schooling
1. teachers
2. schools and society
3. learning and human behavior

B. Themselves and Their Future
4. their career
5. their personal preferences
6. the functions for their professional (interviewing) skills

C. Their Professional Training
7. how to learn and teach interviewing
8. the school psychology program

D. Interviewing (resulting in the above-mentioned 52 categories)
9. what constitutes a good interview
10. questions they had about interviewing

This early in their training, my respondents' use of practical knowledge had obviously not yet reached the stage of professionally exercised skill. They had little or no practical experience in the school milieu, in their professional career, with interviewing, or even with graduate school. Questions about these dimensions typically yielded statements of intent or expectation rather than judgment about personal experience. It seemed, therefore, appropriate to frame the above dimensions (A-D) in a way that expressed the tentative, hypothetical character of my respondents' personal practical knowledge at the time. I consequently conceptualized these dimensions as (A) field-related beliefs and value systems, (B) field-related goals and motivations, (C) field-related metacognitions, and (D) field-related skill concerns. My objective was to demonstrate how these four dimensions interact as students begin to acquire practical knowledge about their functions as school psychologists and as interviewers in particular. I traced students' individual development across these four dimensions and analyzed individual differences for each category of comparison. Showing that such differences existed on every level of description was important since practical knowledge is personally constructed knowledge and thus unique.

Results

The results of my study provide insight into both the commonalities and differences among students. The first part of my results is dedicated to the dimensions which my respondents held in common.

A. Field-Related Beliefs and Value Systems:

My interactions with students revealed a set of ten important belief or value domains that seem relevant to how students define their roles as future school psychologists. These are:
1. Understanding oneself and others. Trying to understand other people's behavior is at the heart of psychology, and so is trying to explore one's own needs and desires.

2. Helping others. Understanding and helping are equally important in this profession.
3. Social change. School psychologists practice in educational institutions which, by necessity, are constantly adjusting to changes in the social system. School psychologists may or may not want to see themselves as change agents in this context.
4. Life-long learning. As part of the ever changing education system, school psychologists are challenged to assess the value of education in general and of their own ongoing education in particular.
5. Taking charge. School psychologists have considerable responsibility for the well-being of many school children and their caregivers. They will be expected to take initiatives and exercise their influence when needed.
6. Dissenting. Most hierarchical institutions generate considerable pressure on their members and clients to conform to the status quo. A responsible professional might have to disagree with powerful stakeholders on critical issues.
7. Competition v. collaboration. Traditionally, schooling has fostered a climate of competition inside and outside the classroom. On the other hand, most school-psychological interventions require the creation of collaborative relationships between the parties involved. The school psychologist may have to address the inherent contradictions between the competitive and collaborative value systems that inform the actions of many clients.
8. Beliefs about school and society. A school psychologist must have more or less detailed notions about the role schools should play as well as the role schools are currently playing in our society.
9. Beliefs about social skills. Probably all human beings develop an image of themselves and of the social skills they have or lack when interacting with other people privately or professionally.
10. Beliefs about the separation of work and privacy. Helping professionals often find themselves in a position where the lines between work and privacy are blurred. School psychologists have to take a stands on the degree of separation to be maintained.

B. Field-Related Goals and Motivations:
Students had been motivated to enter the school psychology program by certain expectations they had about this field. Once they became more familiar with the realities of a school psychologist's work, their original motivations were joined or in some cases replaced by more specific, career-oriented goals. I distinguished a set of seven major goals and motivations:
1. The motivation for psychology rather than education. Most of my respondents came from undergraduate or graduate programs in psychology and expected a career more closely related to psychology rather than education.
2. The motivation/goal to help children. The choice for entering a "school" psychology program was largely influenced by a desire to practice psychology with children.
3. The motivation/goal to work with families. For some students it was clear from the beginning that the families of their clients would be an integral part of their work; for others the need to include families in their job description became apparent only over time.
4. The motivation/goal to do prevention rather than assessment. Working with children and their families typically meant that as school psychologists my respondents wanted to be able to make a difference in people's lives. Thus, the role of a psychometrician, who does nothing

but administer tests was less appealing than the image of the "new" school psychologist, who sets up school-based prevention programs with an impact on pupils, their families, and the school as a whole.

5. The goal of working in the schools. Some school psychology students want to work in the schools, others resign themselves to working in schools, and a third group wants to avoid working in schools at all cost.

6. The goal of a meaningful career. All my respondents saw their career choice as somewhat of a mission, something they wanted to do because it was socially meaningful.

7. The goal of a respectable career. The desire to do something socially meaningful was mixed with the goal of finding a career that distinguished them as professionals and guaranteed some respect and prestige.

C. Field-Related Metacognitions:

By the time of their entry into a graduate program, students have experienced a considerable amount of schooling, and one can generally assume a good deal of sophistication on their part when it comes to study practices and styles of learning. Beyond these general metacognitive beliefs there are other, more situation-specific ones that probably form during the early portions of the program when students are struggling to acquire their new skills. I found the following mix of generic and skill-specific metacognitions to be relevant for my respondents:

1. Experience comes before theory. Partially as a reaction to the program's initial emphasis on theoretical interviewing concepts, students developed a strong conviction that practical experience ought to precede theoretical instruction when it came to professional skills training.

2. Practical skills are best learned through direct feedback. As they observed other people's interviews, roleplayed, and finally did their own interviews, students felt that any feedback other than personalized feedback by their instructors was inferior. They wanted to be told what was good or bad about an interview rather than infer it from their own reflection or discussions with peers.

3. Practical skills need to be modeled. Students appreciated exceptional models and expressed a preference for seeing their instructors model skills for them.

4. Content knowledge comes before process knowledge. Reacting to their first-semester instruction, students complained that too much emphasis had been put on interviewing procedures. They wanted to learn more about the content of typical referral problems before dealing with interviewing techniques and strategies. Their instruction, they felt, had been upside-down.

5. We learn through reflection. Only one student explicitly stressed the importance of learning from reflection, especially from reflection on one's own mistakes.

6. Practical skills require a personal style. Students were adamant in their notion that skills could not be transferred directly but had to be adapted to one's personal style. Style, some stated, could not be learned but had to be discovered inside a person.

D. Field-Related Skill-Concerns:

Over the three years of my study, my respondents mentioned a large number of interviewing competencies (52 altogether) that concerned them at some point or other during that time. I

reduced that number to a collection of interviewing concerns that seemed most pertinent because they were mentioned more often than others, or because my respondents differed most dramatically on them, or because they seemed indicative of a development of different concerns over time. I clustered them according to three dimensions.

Interpersonal Concerns:
These include all the skills an interviewer uses to establish a positive relationship with the client. Interview situations, especially with parents, require much sensitivity because of the potential stress and embarrassment connected with the discussion of issues that may shed a negative light on the client's abilities to educate a child. Important skills include

1. being natural when interacting with the interviewee
2. showing genuine concern for the client
3. relaxing the client
4. showing empathy for the client

Task-Oriented Concerns:
Creating a positive atmosphere is necessary for an effective interview in which pertinent information can be collected. Information-gathering techniques represent the other major element in a successful consultation process. Clients may be willing to reveal information but need guidance in what to focus on and how to organize this information. According to my respondents a good interviewer needs skills in the following areas:

5. Gathering as much information as possible
6. Having a clear direction during the interview
7. Efficiently leading the interviewee
8. Phrasing questions appropriately

Context/Impact Concerns:
The above areas cover the "basics" of interviewing. To function in the real world and increase their chances of truly having an impact on clients, some of my respondents discovered what might be called "higher-order" interviewing competencies that may, in fact, distinguish the novice from the expert. Such competencies include

9. accommodating restrictions on interview time
10. being selective about what to ask whom and when
11. instilling confidence in the client
12. educating the client to look at things differently

Individual Differences:
Traditional educational research has been contented with discovering what individuals (students, teachers, etc.) have in common. The categories above imply an array of characteristics shared by my respondents. However, rather than stopping at what respondents had in common, I found it just as important to ask what made each individual unique. A graduate program in school psychology attracts a highly selective group of students who share many of the same values and goals about their profession and about life in general. One of the most pertinent findings of this study was that, underneath this surface of basic similarities,

each student had a different interpretation of these commonly held beliefs and values and where the shared overall goals would lead them in their own career. The question then became, what difference does this difference make? (Bateson, 1972, p. 381) or how can the differences be systematically described to arrive at individual profiles for each respondent that integrate each respondent's ideological orientations and competency in the target skill?

Personal Practical Knowledge Profiles:

Every student had a specific career goal in mind. Alice didn't know at first but then zeroed in on working in a progressive high school that would allow her to do prevention, such as designing social-skills training programs, and working with families beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Beth wanted to work in a regular school district and do the best she could to care for pupils under the given circumstances. Claire didn't want to go into schools at all, rather she focused on clinical settings in which she envisioned a counseling relationship with longterm-hospitalized children and their families. Dave wanted to avoid pure school settings and preferred mental-health centers in which he would have a more personalized relationship with his clients.

Connected with these career goals were students' value preferences. Alice emphasized the need for understanding others as well as herself. She saw her whole career choice as very tentative and an attempt to explore what she really wanted in life. Beth considered it most important to try to understand and care for others. She was driven by a curiosity about why things were the way they were and how they could be changed if they seemed deficient. Claire was mainly interested in helping those who suffered through no fault of their own (from long-term illness) and believed it was one of her strengths to be able to take charge in those situations. Dave valued the understanding of complex social systems and was, therefore, opposed to the treatment of dysfunctional behavior on a merely individualistic basis.

On a metacognitive level, students also seemed to emphasize different elements when it came to learning interviewing skills. Alice was adamant about putting personal experience before the teaching of theoretical concepts. Beth believed strongly that everybody had their own personal style of learning and that her's was mainly one of learning from interacting with others. Claire believed in the power of positive and negative models, and of direct instructor feedback, whereas Dave stressed more the need to learn from reflection about one's own mistakes and overall performance.

My respondents' goals, values, and metacognitions exhibited a certain consistency with their preferences for certain interviewing competencies. Alice's overall attitude toward the interviewing task favored the establishment of a natural relationship that allowed her to better understand the client. Beth stressed the caring aspect of the encounter, showing the interviewee her genuine concern for the problem and thereby gaining his or her trust and willingness to open up. Claire was mainly concerned about technical efficiency in the attempt to gather as much information as possible, and Dave, in his first interviews, was preoccupied with having direction and being able to lead the interviewee instead of being lead

by him or her.

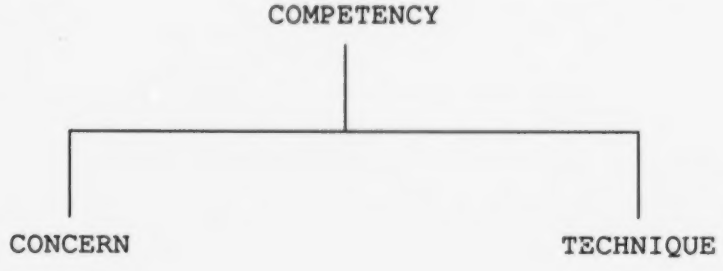
Developmental Aspects:
Over the course of several semesters, these initial skill concerns changed somewhat. At first they had been defined in an exclusionary fashion. Alice's concern for interacting naturally seemed threatened by any attempt to put a predefined agenda on the interview situation; Beth's desire to show genuine concern for the client was equally threatened by any effort to lead the interviewee; Claire was reluctant to spend too much time on empathizing with the interviewee for fear of not making efficient use of her time; and Dave's anxiety about not being sufficiently in control and proving himself as a professional gave him little opportunity to see the options he had for influencing his clients' ways of looking at their own problems.

As students gained more experience, the rigid dualism or bipolarity implied in their earlier views changed gradually. At the end of their programs, Alice appreciated the need for the careful preparation of an interview agenda; Beth recognized that clients often had to be redirected to stay on track and keep the interview from becoming too tiring; Claire acknowledged that she needed to take emotional risks and occasionally probe into sensitive family issues; and Dave had discovered how he could use the interview also as a tool for helping the client to see different perspectives of the problem situation at hand. Overall, there was a more even distribution of interviewing concerns to cover not only the interpersonal (as initially in Alice's and Beth's case) or the task-oriented dimension (as initially in Claire's and Dave's case), but all dimensions of the interview including the context/impact dimension (see above).

Conclusions

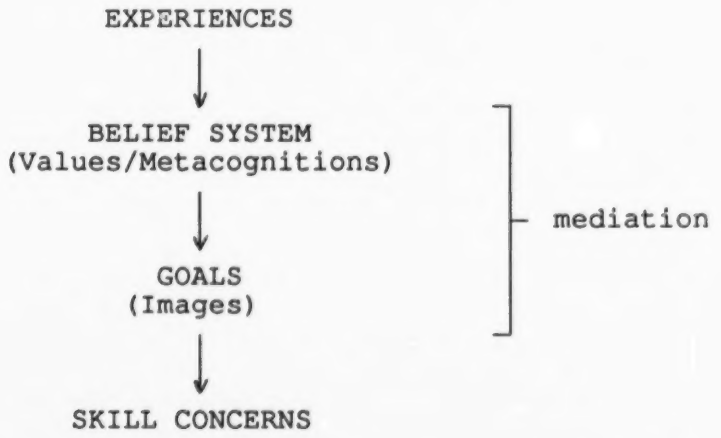
Most of the data I collected in this study were about interviewing competencies my respondents thought a school psychologist should have; in other words, most of my data were about my respondents' interviewing concerns. The technical abilities that have to accompany the skill concerns in order to make for competent performance in the skill domain (see Figure 1) were not explicitly probed in my study. I was, therefore, unable to evaluate what specific interviewing competencies my respondents might have acquired during their training.

Figure 1:



For this reason it would be inadequate to say that my respondents' values, goals, and metacognitions shaped their interviewing competencies. They affected them, but only indirectly via their interviewing concerns. Competencies have a technical and an ideological component. Competent performers have developed a technical routine as well as a conceptual-ideological understanding of their skill. The latter is open to a multitude of influences from the social environment. Figure 2 illustrates how people's experiences with a target skill are mediated by their belief systems--comprised of values and metacognitions--as well as by their goals and motivations. These experiences, consequently, do not directly result in competencies but in the ideological part of competencies, i.e., the skill concerns.

Figure 2:



A remarkable characteristic of this phenomenon is that experiences seem to be mediated by a two-step process: it is not just people's belief systems, their values and metacognitions, but also their goals that appear to lead to the skill concerns. The goals appear to be providing the images that people need to orient their concerns. Many of my respondents' skill concerns were strongly influenced by their image (or lack thereof) of what they wanted to do with their degree; whether they wanted to work in the regular school system or look for alternative settings; what type of help they wanted to provide for which kinds of children; and what role families were expected to play in their psycho-educational interventions. Goals could, indeed, be conceptualized as people's images of their future profession and of tasks they envision as characteristic of that profession. In this sense, the concept of "image" as used by Elbaz (1983) and Clandinin (1986) in their studies of teacher socialization seems applicable to professional development in other fields such as school psychology as well. School psychology students may have significantly fuzzier images of their future career than teacher students do; but their belief systems are translated into skill concerns through the images embodied in their career goals, just as the skill concerns of teacher students are.

Epilogue

Here is what my respondents said five years after their first comments:

ALICE: "I know that my education will be ongoing, and there is much more that I want to learn. At this time, however, I feel that what I really need is more experience rather than more formal schooling or a higher degree. The EdS program in school psych has given me a good foundation, but I'm still trying to figure out where it is exactly that I want to go from here. My present role is primarily testing and determining eligibility for spec ed. I am in a very rural area where I am the sole school psych. The school district and most of the families have very limited resources and the plethora of problems is overwhelming. At this point, one of my primary goals is to have a positive interaction with the child and his/her parents, and to try to convey a sense that there is someone there to talk to and who does care."

BETH: "I like being in the schools where the "real people" are. It is certainly time, though, as a couple of us alluded to in the write-up, that it is extremely beneficial to be familiar with a system--staff, curriculum, the status quo. My second year at G-town was much smoother, and I think the more time spent in a system the more accepted you become. Educators seem to want commitment and continuity. And as I mentioned earlier, familiarity seemed to yield more effective interviews... I enjoyed my two years as a professional. While it was occasionally frustrating, it was always challenging and rewarding. For the most part it was what I expected... I do miss the kids and the teachers, but I'm enjoying being with my baby Sam."

CLAIRE: "My career path seems to have changed a bit. In fact, I am now leaning toward being a stay-at-home mom. It seems I have come full circle. Even before Brendan was born I had become very frustrated with the school psychology program. I have discussed that with you to some extent. Because I want to work in a counseling setting I need a Health Care Provider License. This complicates and limits the settings in which I can do an internship. The internship opportunities in I-town are limited. In addition the laws are changing regarding the license. It seemed it was going to be difficult to do what I wanted to do. As time went by I lost a lot of my motivation. I felt I was having to work too hard and fight too much to make it all work out. More importantly though I have loved staying home with Brendan this past year. I cannot imagine leaving him with a babysitter or in daycare while I do an internship. It is just too important to me to be home with him. I haven't decided definitely not to finish my degree but, at this point, I just don't know how I can work it out. I am disappointed not to have a degree after all of my hard work and dedication. If I had it to do over and knew then what I know now I think I would have entered a masters or doctorate program in counseling psychology or social work. As you know school psychology wasn't entirely what I expected and I was working to make it into what I wanted it to be."

DAVE: "Perhaps psychologists working in a school setting need to obtain additional training outside their graduate studies that will allow them to expand their role, as well as lobby the director of the programs granting them degrees to make necessary changes in their curriculum and training. Over the past year I have come in contact with several school psychologists from different programs throughout the nation, some with much poorer training than I received and some with much better. What is clear to me, is that school psychologists can receive training that is much broader, including emphasis in various theoretical and intervention styles. At [this university] we are exposed to an extremely limited perspective (behaviorism), which I believe does not encourage critical examination of the way we view the world."

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